

## EDITORIAL

# Introducing a New Feature in *The Plant Cell*: Teaching Tools in Plant Biology

*The Plant Cell* has been innovative in developing new types of scientific publication since its inception in 1989. I remember the excitement in being invited to contribute to the first *Plant Cell* special issue and the thrill of seeing my own review in the same issue as a number of seminal overviews on reproductive development. This issue, and the subsequent special issues on plant biochemistry, plant-microbe interactions, vegetative development, plant reproduction revisited, and signaling, have remained classic resources for reviews of particular areas of plant biology, and my own contributions to them rank among my most highly cited publications. So useful were the special issues that now most journals have adopted this format, and the domain of special focus issues is fully populated (if not somewhat oversubscribed). A particularly important contribution that *Plant Cell* special issues made to plant science was to provide current, up-to-date reviews that were beautifully illustrated, suitable for use in undergraduate teaching, and that helped attract students into the field. In thinking about how the remit of *The Plant Cell* could be developed to serve the evolving requirements of the scientific community, *The Plant Cell* Editorial Board has been considering the idea of developing a new product that would support directly the needs of teaching plant science and also attract new students to the field. The current scientific challenges of climate change, bioenergy, and food security indeed represent a “perfect storm” for plant biology. However, if we are to meet these challenges, we must attract more students to the field and effectively communicate to them the wonders and the possibilities that plant science holds.

The result of the Editorial Board’s deliberations will be launched in October in the form of a new and innovative (we hope) online-only feature of *The Plant Cell*, called “Teaching Tools in Plant Biology.” This feature aims to provide undergraduate-level overviews of plant-oriented topics, comprising PowerPoint presentations, lecture notes, and suggestions for further reading. We are aiming the feature at undergraduate professors, giving them general but up-to-date summaries of topics in plant science from which they might craft their own lectures. We hope the feature will also be of interest to scientists in their research by providing basic but peer-reviewed, current overviews of knowledge in particular areas of plant biology from which they can expand their reading for more detailed understanding and appreciation. Our aim is not to put college professors out of business but to provide them with the tools they need to present plant science at its very best.

The feature is being developed by Mary Williams, our new Features Editor for *The Plant Cell*, with support from other *Plant Cell* and ASPB staff members. Mary appreciates the needs of teaching plant science, having taught at Harvey Mudd College for 14 years and having served as chair of the ASPB Education Committee for two terms. The Teaching Tools feature will be published monthly starting with the first and introductory lesson “Why Study Plants?” and will be available in electronic, downloadable format only from *The Plant Cell* website. To sample this feature to see if you like it, it will be available without subscription for the first 6 months at [www.plantcell.org/teachingtools/teaching.dtl](http://www.plantcell.org/teachingtools/teaching.dtl). After the introductory period, Teaching

Tools will be available only to subscribers of *The Plant Cell*.

Beyond the introductory lesson, topics for other lessons during the first year will include leaf development, phyllotaxy, small regulatory RNAs, epigenetics, and a series of lessons on each of the plant growth regulators. We welcome suggestions for future topics and comments about the form of the presentations, the level at which they are pitched, and whether additional features would be useful. Once we have honed the prototype, we hope to encourage lessons submitted from other authors, which would be edited and formatted into the Teaching Tools style in house. Each lesson will be peer reviewed to ensure accuracy and will be updated frequently to ensure that the latest opinions and knowledge are represented.

Because this is a completely new type of feature, we strongly encourage and will greatly value feedback from our readers on whether or not it works for teaching purposes; if it is useful to you as a teacher, a student, or a researcher trying to keep up with the fundamentals of other fields; and how it might best be improved. In this sense, it is the same as any other new feature in publishing. Comments we have received so far have been highly encouraging, but please continue to let us know what you think of the final product after it is released. We will also consider the possibility of translation into other languages, depending on the feedback from the readership. Please send your comments and questions to Features Editor Mary Williams at [mwilliams@aspb.org](mailto:mwilliams@aspb.org).

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*Plant Cell* 2009;21;2541; originally published online September 29, 2009;

DOI 10.1105/tpc.109.210980

This information is current as of April 17, 2021

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